

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Forrest Brisbin Spaulding has been considered one of the great American leaders of the 20th century. Although [Spaulding](#) was not born in Iowa, he spent much of his adult life in Des Moines. He first worked as director of the [Des Moines Public Library](#) from 1917 to 1919. In 1920, he moved to Peru where he was a correspondent for the Associated Press and oversaw the country's libraries and museums. Spaulding then returned to Des Moines and served as director of the Des Moines Public Library from 1927 to 1952.



**b. 1892 – d. 1965**

In 1938, Spaulding wrote the [Library Bill of Rights](#), which presented his belief in the power of the written word and the basic rights of every person to have access to information. In 1938, the [American Library Association](#) adopted the Library Bill of Rights and still applies these basic principles today.

### **American Library Association Policies**

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services:

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded

- because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
  - III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
  - IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
  - V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
  - VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

*Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996.*



**Des Moines Public Library**



**The Des Moines Public Library building today, now the headquarters for the World Food Prize**

**Forrest Spaulding - 1937  
President of the Iowa Library Association**



### **State Library of Iowa Recounts Spaulding's Contributions**

*The following information was taken from a brochure provided by the State Library of Iowa and printed by the Des Moines Public Library:*

Forrest Spaulding's contributions to the Des Moines Public Library, the State of Iowa, and the United States combined to make him a legend in his own time.

Spaulding championed the civil rights of all Americans, spoke out against bigotry and censorship, and authored the Library Bill of Rights in 1938 in a direct challenge to the growing intolerance in the world, according to a 1947 *Des Moines Register* article.

Born in Nashua, New Hampshire in 1882, Spaulding attended a private academy there, followed by seminary school in Massachusetts before finding employment as a newspaper reporter in New York City. There, he attended the New York Public Library's library school, graduating in 1913. After working in libraries in New Jersey and New York, Spaulding became head of the Des Moines Public Library in 1917 at the age of 25. Before leaving Des Moines in 1919, Spaulding not only was director of the public library, but organized a library at Camp Dodge (IA) for World War I recruits, as well as military camp libraries in nearby states.

After serving as director of libraries for the federal Coast Guard, Merchant Marine and Lighthouse services, Spaulding moved to Peru in 1920 to head the country's libraries and museums. He was also a correspondent for the Associated Press. He is noted as saying that his efforts to report the news from that country gave him a bitter object lesson in censorship.

Spaulding returned to head the Des Moines Public Library in 1927. His most significant contributions at the time were made in response to the crises of the Great Depression and World War II. He was acutely aware of the personal and social problems created by unemployment. In 1934, he established the Men's Reading Room in the basement of the library, which soon became known as "the waterfront university." In 1935, he sought and received funding from the federal Works Progress Administration for a



variety of programs, including an all-day reading room for men that included technical and vocational, as well as recreational, reading materials.

The Great Depression also affected the Des Moines Public Library's budget. From 1935-36, a local tax limitation bill caused a 36 percent cut to the library. Book purchases were slashed, staff and salaries were cut, and branch libraries closed. Like the recessions of today, people flocked to the library. Library card registration and circulation of books greatly increased until employment picked up.

By 1930, Spaulding had become an important member of the Iowa Library Association. He served on many committees, including Certification and Publicity, and served as president from 1936-37.

Spaulding also served in many American Library Association activities during the 1930s and 40s and was president of the Public Libraries Division of ALA. During that time, he spoke out against bigotry and censorship. In 1948, he received an award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews for his role in the struggle against racial intolerance.

In the 1940s he became an outspoken critic of censorship. A Des Moines minister protested to Spaulding that Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, should be banned at the library. Spaulding responded by saying that "if more people had read *Mein Kampf*, some of Hitler's despotism might have been prevented." He maintained that danger to the United States was not in knowing all about Hitler, but in not knowing all about him. He said that "we should fear the tendency of small minds in these days of stress."

Two years earlier, Spaulding wrote the first Library's Bill of Rights and ALA adopted it in 1939. It was ALA's response to the pressures of the book *Grapes of Wrath*. At the same time, ALA voted to establish a Committee on Censorship. In May 1940, ALA released a statement saying that "to burn or destroy a book is to destroy a part of the heritage of knowledge to which future generations are entitled." The Committee on Intellectual Freedom was formed to "safeguard the rights of library users to freedom of inquiry... in accordance with the U.S. Bill of Rights and the Library's Bill of Rights." The Library's Bill of Rights originally focused on unbiased book selection, a balanced collection and open meeting rooms.

In the 1950s, the political tone of America had changed. The paragraph in the original Library's Bill of Rights declaring that library meeting rooms should be available to all groups regardless of their beliefs was now controversial. Some librarians refused to make their rooms available for meetings of the American Communist Party. But the Library's Bill of Rights was not repudiated by ALA during the anti-Community excitement of the 1940s and 50s.

By the time of his retirement in 1952, Spaulding had gained national acclaim for his work in Des Moines. His retirement ended when he took the job of librarian in his hometown of Nashua, New Hampshire.

Spaulding and his wife, Genevieve (Pierson), had two children. After Spaulding's death in 1965, the *Des Moines Register* wrote:

"Ordinarily a community is not greatly stirred by the death of a man who has been away for 13 years, but it is different with Forrest Spaulding. He made himself so much a part of the life of Des Moines that the thought of him is still warm and pleasant.

"He went far beyond the role of librarian to help out in every cultural and intellectual phase of city activity. His interest ranged from purely city activities to foreign affairs. He was a friend of Henry A. Wallace, whose death preceded his by a few days.

"He will be remembered not only for his activities but for his personality. He was a friendly, social man, with a mischievous love of a pun or humorous phrase. Among those who knew and loved these traits of his, it is as though he never left Des Moines at all."

Information for this brochure was provided by Des Moines Public Library, and an October 22, 2005, article in the *Nashua Telegraph*, Nashua, Iowa.